

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-4 (Canceled).

Claim 5 (Currently amended): A process for distillatively separating a mixture comprising a vinyl ether of the general formula (I)



and alcohol of the general formula (II)



wherein

R^1 and R^2 are each independently a C_2 - C_4 -alkyl radical, and

the alcohol (II) has a boiling point which is at least 1°C higher, measured at or extrapolated to 0.1 MPa abs, than the vinyl ether [(II)] (I), comprising:

a) passing the mixture into a first distillation column and withdrawing, as a top product, an azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) and, as a bottom product, a stream enriched with the alcohol (II);

b) passing the azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) from the first distillation column into a second distillation column which is operated at a pressure which is from 0.01 to 3 MPa higher compared to the first distillation column, and withdrawing the vinyl ether, as a gaseous sidestream in a stripping section of the second distillation column in a region of the lower 25% of a total number of theoretical plates, and, as a top product, an azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II); and

c) recycling the azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) from the second distillation column into the first distillation column.

Claim 6 (Canceled).

Claim 7 (Previously presented): The process according to claim 5, wherein the R¹ and R² radicals are identical.

Claim 8 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 5, further comprising:
distillatively removing low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column to form a purified alcohol II and
recycling the purified alcohol (II) to a vinyl ether (I) synthesis
wherein the vinyl ether (I) synthesis comprises:
reacting the alcohol (II) with an ethyne in the presence of a basic alkali metal or alkaline earth metal compound.

Claim 9 (Original): The process according to claim 8, wherein the distillative removal of low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column is carried out in a dividing wall column or an arrangement of distillation columns having heat and/or mass transfer.

Claim 10 (Currently amended): The process according to Claim 5, further comprising:
passing the vinyl ether (I) withdrawn from the second distillation column as gaseous sidestream in the stripping section into a purifying distillation column and

obtaining [[the]] purified vinyl ether (I) from the purifying distillation column as a top product.

Claim 11 (Previously presented): The process according to Claim 8, wherein the R¹ and R² radicals are identical.

Claim 12 (Previously presented): The process according to Claim 11, further comprising:

distillatively removing low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column and
recycling the purified alcohol (II) to a vinyl ether (I) synthesis
wherein the vinyl ether (I) synthesis comprises:
reacting the alcohol (II) with an ethyne in the presence of a basic alkali metal or alkaline earth metal compound.

Claim 13 (Previously presented): The process according to claim 12, wherein the distillative removal of low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column is carried out in a dividing wall column or an arrangement of distillation columns having heat and/or mass transfer.

Claim 14 (Currently amended): The process according to Claim 7, wherein the vinyl ether and the ~~vinyl~~ alcohol respectively are selected from the group consisting of ethyl vinyl ether and ethanol, 1-propyl vinyl ether and 1-propanol, 2-propyl vinyl ether and 2-propanol, 1-butyl vinyl ether and 1-butanol, 2-butyl vinyl ether and 2-butanol, isobutyl vinyl ether and isobutanol and tert-butyl vinyl ether and tert-butanol.

Claim 15 (Currently amended): The process according to Claim 11, wherein the vinyl ether and the ~~vinyl~~ alcohol respectively are selected from the group consisting of ethyl vinyl ether and ethanol, 1-propyl vinyl ether and 1-propanol, 2-propyl vinyl ether and 2-propanol, 1-butyl vinyl ether and 1-butanol, 2-butyl vinyl ether and 2-butanol, isobutyl vinyl ether and isobutanol and tert-butyl vinyl ether and tert-butanol.